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ABSTRACT

This paper explains the methodology and procedures used by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) in carrying out a national survey of community college students to gather information on student demographic characteristics, educational background, educational objectives, and opinions about the college experience. As background material indicates, the CSCC was charged with the responsibility of surveying a random sample of 10,000 students enrolled in public community colleges in spring 1986 in all curricula, including collegiate and vocational courses that offer credit toward a degree or certificate (credit courses), and community education courses that do not offer degree or certificate credit (noncredit courses). A section on methodology explains how the samples of colleges and of class sections were drawn in order to complete the in-class survey of 8,000 credit students and 2,000 noncredit students. Next, survey procedures are delineated, indicating the role of the campus facilitator in acting as liaison between the CSCC and the instructors, explaining the content of the survey packet developed by the CSCC for each participating class, and detailing the system used to code the completed packets. The final section explains how the data will be analyzed. (EJV)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE INVOLVEMENT IN THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

REPORT ON THE STUDENT SURVEY

First-year progress report to the

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

30 June 1986

JC 860 309

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in July 1986, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges began a two-year national study of the education of adults at community colleges. Funded by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the study's overall purpose is to assess varying patterns of service provided by community colleges to different adult populations, including traditional college-age students seeking an entrance into the labor market, older students who are making career changes, adults seeking avocational instruction, retirees, and others.

This report, one of three describing first-year study activities, details the methodology and procedures of one of the study's major components: a national survey of a random sample of approximately 10,000 community college students enrolled in credit and noncredit courses during Winter or Spring of the 1985-86 academic year. The survey, administered in randomly selected class sections at approximately 100 community colleges, collected information on (1) student demographic characteristics, (2) student educational backgrounds, (3) student educational objectives, and (4) opinions about the college experience. As of this writing, the data are being analyzed to identify significant differences (if any) in responses by age and educational intent.

Student Survey

Much of the first year's activity has been devoted to planning and carrying out a national survey of community college students. The survey instrument was designed during the fall of 1985, and it subsequently underwent a pilot test at Santa Monica College. After appropriate revisions were made, the survey was administered to a random sample of 11,974 students during the Spring term of 1986; we have received 7,440 returns. The following paragraphs explain the survey methodology and procedures.

Sampling Methodology and Procedures

The Center for the Study of Community Colleges was charged by Carnegie with the responsibility of surveying a random sample of 10,000 students enrolled in the nation's public community colleges during the Spring term of academic year 1985-86. The sample was to include students in all curricula, including collegiate and vocational courses that offer credit toward a degree or certificate ("credit courses"), and community education courses that do not offer degree or certificate credit ("noncredit courses"). Because annual enrollment data collected by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges indicate that the ratio of credit to noncredit course enrollment is approximately four to one, we estimated that our sample would include 8,000 credit students and 2,000 noncredit students.

Ideally, the sample would be drawn by identifying all students enrolled in the colleges and selecting individual

students at random. Because it is not feasible to follow this procedure, however, the Center settled on a compromise approach involving the random selection of class sections in colleges nationwide and surveying--in class--students who are enrolled in those class sections.

In order to draw the selection of class sections, the following steps were taken. First, Center staff drew a random sample of public community colleges in the United States by selecting every fifth public institution listed in the 1985 Community, Technical, and Junior College Directory (Washington, D.C. : American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1985). Second, a letter was sent to the president of each of the selected colleges explaining the purpose of the study and asking for his or her cooperation. The president was also asked to send a schedule of classes for the spring semester (or appropriate quarter) and to name an on-campus facilitator who would distribute the survey instruments to the appropriate classes and return the completed instruments to the Center. As the class schedules were received by the Center, a rolling sample of class sections was drawn consisting of every 100th credit and every 50th noncredit class listed in the schedules. The rolling method of drawing class sections assures that in counting the class sections, a different starting point is used for each schedule sent to us by the colleges. This eliminates bias due to the order, ususally alphabetical, in which class sections are listed. It should be mentioned that in drawing the sample of class sections, certain classes were excluded: laboratories,

independent study sections, sections involving off-campus internships, sections without a scheduled time or place, or sections that met on only three or fewer occasisons. Students enrolled in telecourses were also necessarily excluded.

The decision to draw every 100th credit class section and every 50th noncredit class section was based on rough estimates of how many class sections would be needed to secure the participation of 10,000 students. Although we asked 20 percent of the nation's public community colleges to particiapte, we estimated that only 10 percent (100 colleges) would agree to take part, representing approximately 400,000 students in credit courses and 100,000 students in noncredit courses. If the average class size is 28--a rough figure arrived at from past surveys of students in liberal arts courses--the 100 colleges participating in the survey would have approximately 14,286 (400,000/28) credit class sections and 3,571 (100,000/28) noncredit class sections. If our sample was to include 8,000 credit students and 2,000 noncredit students, it at first appeared that we would have to survey 286 credit class sections (or every 50th credit class) and 71 noncredit classes (or every 50th class).

When one considers, however, that students in credit classes are probably more likely to take two or more courses per term than students in community services, noncredit courses, then it becomes apparent that individual credit students have a greater statistical probability of being drawn in the sample than individual noncredit students. By the same token, individual credit students have a greater probability of being drawn twice

or more in the sample than students in noncredit courses. Therefore, an adjustment was needed to equalize the probability that individual credit and noncredit students would be drawn. Estimating that the average credit student takes 2.5 courses per term, we multiplied the population of credit class sections in the 100 participating colleges (14,286) by 2.5 and used the product (35,715) as an estimate of the total number of class sections (based on unduplicated headcount enrollment) making up the population of class sections from which the sample would be drawn. Since our sample required 286 class sections, we estimated that every 125th credit class section (35,715/286) would have to be drawn in the sample.

Thus, we began to draw the sample of class sections using every 50th noncredit class and every 125th credit class. One more adjustment was required, however, when it became apparent that the estimated class size of 28 was too high. The average credit class size turned out to be approximately 20, and it was necessary to increase the number of credit class sections in the sample by drawing every 100th class.

Survey Procedures

As the sample was drawn, a checklist of selected class sections was typed up for each participating college and mailed to the campus facilitators. The facilitators were asked to (1) secure the cooperation of the instructors teaching the selected classes, (2) determine the number of students in each class, and (3) return a copy of the checklist to the Center, indicating the enrollment for each class. If classes had been cancelled, or if

the instructor refused to participate, the Center staff worked with the facilitator to choose alternative classes in the same subject areas. For example, if a typing class had been selected but subsequently cancelled, an attempt would be made to substitute another typing class or, at least, another class dealing with secretarial or clerical skills, preferably at a similar time of day. In all, 628 class sections were selected for inclusion in the survey.

Once the enrollment information was received from the facilitators, Center staff prepared a packet for each participating class. The packets included the survey instruments needed for each class, as well as a letter to the instructors explaining the purpose of the survey. The facilitators were asked to distribute the packets to the instructors, to retrieve the packets after the instructors had administered the survey in class, and to return the packets to the Center. Once returned to the Center, the completed instruments in each packet were coded by the center staff; the code includes a college identification number, as well as numbers indicating the credit status of the class (credit/noncredit), the class subject area, the time at which the class was offered, the class location (off campus/on campus), and the college's enrollment size. (See Figure One for the survey instrument coding scheme and Figure Two for the class subject area code.) Blank surveys returned to the Center were recycled and administered to students at additional colleges drawn at random; consequently, while only 10,000 survey instruments were printed, 11,974 were distributed.

In all, 628 class sections were selected for inclusion in the survey; of those class sections, approximately 20 percent were noncredit classes. The relatively low number of noncredit classes is due primarily to the fact that the vast majority of noncredit classes listed by the colleges in our sample were offered on a short-term basis with only three or fewer class meetings. Students in these short-term classes were not surveyed, because it was unlikely that instructors would give up 30 minutes of class time required to administer the survey instrument. We will use the staff and administrator surveys (planned for the 1986-87 academic year) to gather information on the scope of these short-term classes and on the populations to which they will appeal.

Data Analysis

Responses were received from 548 (87 percent) of the 628 class sections included in the survey. The data are now being entered onto a tape which will be made available to Carnegie for analysis. Along with the tape we will provide frequency counts for each survey item as well as selected cross tabulations. It should be noted that the ten-digit code added to each survey instrument (see Figure One and Figure Two) identifies the type of class in which the student was sitting while filling out the survey instrument. This will allow us to analyze responses by curricular area, and to determine, for example, who is served by vocational courses and who is enrolled in noncredit courses.

Figure One

Survey Instrument Coding Scheme

Digits	
1,2,3	College Identification Code
4	Credit, Noncredit 0 = unknown 1 = credit 2 = noncredit
5,6	Class subject identification code
7	Class Time 0 = unknown 1 = weekday, before 5:00 PM 2 = weekday evening, after 5:00 PM 3 = Saturday or Sunday 4 = Other Combination
8	Class Location 0 = unknown 1 = off campus 2 = on campus
9	College size 0 = 1 - 1,499 1 = 1,500 - 2,999 2 = 3,000 - 6,999 3 = 7,000 or over
10	Blank; mark "0"

FIGURE TWO

CLASS SUBJECT AREA CODE

00 UNKNOWN

01 REMEDIAL Including writing below college compostition, reading, math below algebra, and any classes designated by the college as remedial or developmental skills, study skills.

02 HUMANITIES Including art history, foreign languages, literature, history, philosophy, music appreciation, theater history, political science, English as a second language, archaeology, business law, cultural anthropology.

03 SOCIAL SCIENCES Including sociology, anthropology, physicial anthropology, psychology, education, economics.

04 BIOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SCIENCES Including biology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, agronomy.

05 MATHEMATICS Including algebra and beyond, business math, math for business

06 APPLIED SCIENCES Including engineering, architecture, drafting, robotics, aviation, surveying.

07 BUSINESS Including accounting, finance, marketing, general business, agribusiness, restaurant management.

08 COMPUTER SCIENCE Including programming, systems analysis.

09 ALLIED HEALTH Including registered nursing, dental hygiene, medical laboratory technicians, dental assisting, practical or vocational nursing, nutrition.

10 OFFICE AND CLERICAL SKILLS Such as typing, secretarial skills, word processing, key punching, software applications such as LOTUS and D-BASE II

11 APPLIED ARTS Including printing, photography, fashion design, interior design, painting.

12 SKILLED CRAFTS Including construction trades, auto mechanics, machine shop, maching repair.

13 OTHER SERVICES Such as cosmetology, cooking, groundskeeping, landscaping.

14 SOCIAL SERVICES Such as law enforcement, corrections, teacher's aide, library assisting, child care.

15 PHYSICAL EDUCATION Including aerobics, yoga.

16 ENGLISH COMPOSITION Including speech, rhetoric, business communication.

17 PERFORMING ARTS Including dance, music, drama.

18 OTHER

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